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REJECTIONIST ISLAMISM IN SAUDI ARABIA: THE STORY OF JUHAYMAN AL-ʿUTAYBI REVISITED

The storming of the Mecca mosque by Juhayman al-ʿUtaybi and his fellow rebels in November 1979 represents one of the most spectacular events in the modern history of Saudi Arabia. Yet, it is one of the least understood. Even decades after the event, many important questions remain unanswered. Who were the rebels, and what did they want? Why and how did Juhayman's group come into existence?[1] What happened with the rebels and their ideas after the Mecca events? This article seeks to shed light on the story and legacy of Juhayman al-ʿUtaybi with new information gathered from extensive fieldwork in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere.

Whereas the details of the Mecca operation are relatively well known, the origin of the rebel group is shrouded in mystery.[2] The existing literature on Juhayman's movement is both sparse and contradictory. The interested student will find few in-depth studies of it in English.[3] The Arabic-language literature on Juhayman is somewhat more extensive and has certainly been underexploited by Western academics, but many works suffer from inaccuracies and political bias.[4] A key problem has been the absence of good primary sources, which has made it virtually impossible for historians to trace the origin and history of Juhayman's movement in any significant detail. This changed in 2003, when Nasir al-Huzaymi, a former associate of Juhayman al-ʿUtaybi, lifted the veil on his past and wrote a series of articles in the Saudi press about his experience as a member of Juhayman's group.[5] Al-Huzaymi had been active in the organization between 1976 and 1978 but left a year before the Mecca operation. He was caught in the police roundup after the event and spent eight years in prison. Al-Huzaymi has renounced his former Islamist convictions and now works as a journalist for the Saudi newspaper *al-Riyadh*.

Al-Huzaymi is one of several former Islamist radicals in Saudi Arabia who, from the late 1990s onward, began speaking publicly about their experiences as activists.[6] Although their emergence at this particular point in time was facilitated by the process of limited liberalization initiated by Crown Prince ʿAbdallah in 1999 and to some extent exploited by authorities as a counterbalance to conservative Islamist forces, it was by no means orchestrated by the state. These repentants had emerged gradually in independent

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communities and began speaking out before 9/11 or the 2003 terrorist campaign in Saudi Arabia. There are strong reasons to take al-Huzaymi's testimony seriously. His account is descriptive, unflattering toward the authorities, and above all consistent with other key historical sources.

The current article is based on a detailed reading of the available English- and Arabic-language literature about Juhayman, as well as on extensive fieldwork. During a series of research visits to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the authors of this article interviewed Nasir al-Huzaymi and several other former Saudi Islamists with in-depth knowledge of the Juhayman movement and phenomenon. By means of a generous intermediary, we obtained the testimony of a senior Medina-based cleric who was very close to Juhayman's group in the 1970s and attended the Grand Mosque during the 1979 siege. We traced the anonymous authors of the main Arabic books about Juhayman al-ʿUtaybi published in the early 1980s to identify and assess their primary sources.[7] We also spoke to journalists who covered the Juhayman story in the Mecca area in 1979. During this two-year research process, we were able to collect the accounts of several individuals, in addition to Nasir al-Huzaymi, who were either part of Juhayman's group or eyewitnesses to key events in the group's history.

Our article is divided into three parts. The first and most voluminous part is devoted to the history of Juhayman's movement leading up to the storming of the Mecca mosque in 1979. In the second part, we will reflect on the nature of this movement and evaluate existing theories and interpretations of the phenomenon. Finally, we shall examine the ideological legacy of Juhayman al-ʿUtaybi and his influence on subsequent radical movements in Saudi Arabia up to the present day. The article presents two central arguments. The first is that our research shows that the group that stormed the Mecca mosque in 1979 was a radicalized fraction of a much broader pietistic organization set up in Medina in the mid-1960s under the name of al-Jamaʿa al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba (JSM), that is, the Salafi Group that Commands Right and Forbids Wrong. The second main argument is that the JSM and its radical offshoot, Juhayman's Ikhwan (Brotherhood), were among the first manifestations of a particular type of Saudi Islamism that outlived Juhayman and has played an important yet subtle role in the shaping of the country's political landscape until today. It is characterized by a strong focus on ritual practices, a declared disdain for politics, and yet an active rejection of the state and its institutions.[8] This so-called "rejectionist Islamism" is intellectually and organizationally separate from the other and more visible forms of Saudi Islamist opposition such as the so-called "awakening" (al-Sahwa) movement or the Bin Ladin style jihadists.[9]

OPPOSITION AND ISLAMISM IN SAUDI ARABIA BEFORE 1979

There have been relatively few cases of violent opposition to the rule of the Al Saʿud since the foundation of the third Saudi state by ʿAbd al-ʿAziz bin Saʿud in 1902. The first and most violent was the so-called "Ikhwan revolt" of the late 1920s. The Ikhwan were bedouin from major Najdi tribes such as ʿUtayba and Mutayr who had been religiously indoctrinated and trained as a military force for use in the territorial expansion of the nascent Saudi state. When the expansion reached the border of territories controlled by the British colonial power, King ʿAbd al-ʿAziz called for an end to further military campaigns. The Ikhwan, who had already grown critical of ʿAbd al-ʿAziz because of

his use of modern technology and interaction with Westerners, were outraged by the abandonment of jihad for reasons of realpolitik. Some of the Ikhwan leaders also had personal political ambitions that were thwarted by Ibn Saud.[10] They refused to lay down their weapons and instead rebelled against their king. After a series of clashes, the bedouin fighting force, led by Sultan bin Bijad and Faysal Al Dawish, shaykhs of the ʿUtayba and Mutayr tribes, was crushed at the battle of Sbila in 1929. Ikhwan members who had remained loyal were later absorbed into the national guard.

The 1950s and 1960s witnessed a few episodes of leftist and communist unrest in the kingdom, which reinforced the regime's conviction that a reliance on religious forces was the best means of social control. The accession to the throne of the Pan-Islamist King Faisal in 1964 and the dynamics of the Arab Cold War further increased the budgets and the influence of the religious establishment and Islamic organizations in Saudi Arabia. This created a context favorable to the development of local brands of Islamism, from which later movements of political–religious opposition would emerge.

At this time, two different types of Islamism developed in Saudi Arabia. One was pragmatic, political, and elitist and became known as the Islamic awakening (*al-ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya*), or just the Sahwa. This represented the mainstream of the Saudi Islamist movement. On its margins emerged an isolationist, pietistic, and lower-class Islamist phenomenon, which can be termed "rejectionist" or "neo-Salafi." From the 1960s to the 1990s, the two strains coexisted, representing relatively distinct ideological approaches and sociological phenomena, although the former remained politically and numerically more significant. The Sahwa developed primarily on university campuses after the arrival, from the late 1950s onward, of large numbers of members of the Muslim Brotherhood fleeing persecution in countries such as Egypt and Syria. These individuals—many of whom were academics or well-trained professionals—rapidly became the backbone of the newly established Saudi education and media sectors. It was partly through their impulse that the Sahwa gained momentum in Saudi universities in the 1970s and 1980s, before spearheading the reformist Islamist opposition of the early 1990s. Ideologically, the Sahwa represented a blend of the traditional Wahhabi outlook (mainly on social issues) and the more contemporary Muslim Brotherhood approach (especially on political issues). Politically, representatives of the Sahwa have sought to reform the state's policies without ever straightforwardly questioning the state's legitimacy.[11]

However, it is from the other Islamist strain—the rejectionist one—that Juhayman's movement emerged in the 1970s. In 1961, the Islamic University of Medina had been set up under the leadership of Grand Mufti Muhammad bin Ibrahim Al al-Shaykh and the later well-known ʿAbd al-ʿAziz bin Baz.[12] Both of them were eager to inspire a broader Wahhabi movement in the Hijaz, which for decades had enjoyed relative cultural and religious autonomy. They therefore encouraged their students to engage in proselytizing (*daʿwa*) and enforcement of religious laws (*ḥisba*).

These developments coincided with the arrival of new ideological influences on the Medinan religious scene, in particular that of Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani (1914–99). Al-Albani was a Syria-based scholar of Albanian origin who had been invited by ʿAbd al-ʿAziz bin Baz, then vice-president of the Islamic University of Medina, to teach there in 1961. Al-Albani had become famous in Syria for identifying himself with the medieval school of thought known as the *ahl al-ḥadīth* (i.e., "the people of

hadith"), which he claimed to revive. The *ahl al-ḥadīth* had become known in the 8th century for opposing the use of reason in religious rulings, insisting that only the Sunna was to provide answers for matters not explicitly treated in the Qur'an. Their scholars, therefore, developed a particular interest in the collection and the study of hadith. Of the four canonical law schools that were to emerge a century later, only the Hanbali school followed a strict *ahl al-ḥadīth* line. The late Hanbalis, however, increasingly tended to imitate (*taqlīd*) former rulings by members of their school, instead of practicing their own interpretation (*ijtihād*) based on the Qur'an and the Sunna. This was one of al-Albani's main reproaches to the Wahhabis, who claimed *ijtihād* but tended to act as Hanbalis, and, therefore, as *madhhabī*s (i.e., those who follow a particular school of jurisprudence). Al-Albani, in return, rejected all the schools of jurisprudence, calling for direct and exclusive reliance on the Qur'an and the Sunna. Another of his reproaches was that Wahhabis did not care enough about hadith. In return, he held his own views on the authenticity and readings of certain hadith, and, therefore, his rulings sometimes ran counter to well-established—and especially Wahhabi—beliefs, notably on ritual issues. In his well-known book *Sifat salat al-Nabi* (Characteristics of the Prophet's Prayer), al-Albani presented several peculiar views on Islamic rituals, which raised controversy with other scholars. Some say these controversies led to his expulsion from Medina in 1963, although the exact circumstances of his departure are unclear. Al-Albani would nevertheless maintain a close relationship with the Saudi ulama throughout his life, particularly with Ibn Baz. The teachings of the charismatic al-Albani were to have a strong impact on the Saudi religious scene, not least because they formed the ideological basis for the pietistic organization from which Juhayman's rebels would emerge, namely, al-Jamaʿa al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba.

AL-JAMAʿA AL-SALAFIYYA AL-MUHTASIBA

The group known as al-Jamaʿa al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba took shape in Medina in the mid-1960s. It was formed by a small group of religious students who for some time had been proselytizing in the city's poorer neighborhoods.[13] Having been influenced by al-Albani, they were driven by a general conviction that mainstream schools and tendencies in the Muslim world at the time—including the official Wahhabism of the Saudi religious establishment—needed to be purified of innovations and misperceptions. They were also acting to counter the growing influence of other groups on the religious scene in early 1970s Medina, particularly Jamaʿat al-Tabligh, but also the Muslim Brotherhood.[14] Both of these aims—promoting a purified Wahhabism and providing an alternative to existing forms of Islamic activism—were shared by some of the most prominent religious scholars in Medina at the time, such as ʿAbd al-ʿAziz bin Baz and Abu Bakr al-Jaza'iri.[15] The founding members of the JSM developed personal contacts with these scholars and considered ibn Baz their shaykh.

The formation of the JSM was prompted by an episode known among the members as "the breaking of the pictures" (*taksīr al-ṣuwar*) which occurred in approximately 1965. The proselytizers had gradually come to see it as their duty to enforce religious obligations and regulations in certain parts of Medina. This included destroying pictures and photographs in public spaces. In the early 1960s, there was friction and even minor clashes in Medina between these zealous conservatives and local residents.[16] This

vigilantism went unnoticed or ignored until a group of young activists were caught smashing a large number of display windows showing female mannequins in the center of Medina. Having inflicted serious damage on commercial property, the perpetrators were arrested and imprisoned for approximately a week.[17] This confrontation with the police inspired the main activists to intensify and coordinate their efforts. Not long after this incident, they decided to set up an organization under the name al-Jamaʿa al-Salafiyya (the Salafi group). They approached Ibn Baz to ask for his approval. He greeted the initiative and suggested that they add the qualification *al-muḥtasiba* ("which practices *ḥisba*") to the name of their group.[18] Ibn Baz thus became the official spiritual guide (*murshid*) of al-Jamaʿa al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba and appointed Abu Bakr al-Jazaʾiri as his deputy.[19] The JSM had no official executive leader but was governed by a consultative council (*majlis al-shūrā*) of five or six members, which included four of the founding members and al-Jazaʾiri.

The group gradually stepped up its activities and attracted an increasingly large number of followers in Medina. In the early 1970s, they set themselves up in a purpose-built two-story building known as Bayt al-Ikhwan (House of the Brotherhood) located in the poor neighborhood of al-Hara al-Sharqiyya in Medina, an area known for the strict conservatism of its residents. Bayt al-Ikhwan became the natural assembly point and administrative center for the JSM, as well as a forum for daily classes and weekly conferences. It was administered by Ahmad Hasan al-Muʿallim, a close friend of Juhayman and a Yemeni former student at the Islamic university.

Over time, the JSM's organizational structure became increasingly large and complex. Special administrative groups were set up to coordinate practical matters. One group (initially headed by Juhayman) specialized in organizing members' travels, another in reception of guests, and a third in organizing trips to the villages for "wandering travelers" (*al-musāfirūn al-jawwālūn*) to preach and recruit new members.[20] The JSM encouraged its adherents to set up similar communities in other cities around the kingdom. By 1976, the JSM had followers based in practically all major Saudi cities, including Mecca, Riyadh, Jidda, Taif, Haʾil, Abha, Dammam, and Burayda. All branches had a local leader or contact person. Some branches, like the one in Mecca, were also based in purpose-built houses.[21]

To determine the socioeconomic profiles of JSM members, we asked al-Huzaymi to provide us with as much information as he remembered on members of the group. This, combined with other sources, allowed us to gather basic demographic data on thirty-five individuals, which enabled us to make a few important overall observations.[22] First, it seems that most members were young, unmarried men. Some members did have families, but no women played any direct role in the organization. Adherents covered a relatively wide age span—from late teens to late forties—but the majority seem to have been in their mid 20s. Second, most JSM members came from marginalized or discriminated backgrounds. Many were recently urbanized young men with a *badawī* (translated as bedouin[23]) background.[24] Historically, tribes have largely been considered the losers of the Saudi modernization process, both in political terms (at the collective level) and in economic terms (at the individual level).[25] Other JSM members were residents of foreign origin (with and without Saudi citizenship), mostly from Yemen.[26] It is no secret that foreigners have long suffered a degree of social and political, if not necessarily economic, discrimination in Saudi society.[27] The refusal of JSM members, for ideological reasons,

to take government positions often contributed to their marginalization. They were, therefore, often described by outside observers at the time as "unemployed," "shop assistants," or "students."[28]

Ideologically, the JSM was initially focused on moral and religious reform, not on politics. In its view, Islam had been corrupted by the introduction of reprehensible innovations (*bidʿa*) in religious practice and by society's deviation from religious principles. They advocated a return to a strict and literal reading of the Qurʾan and hadith as the sole source of religious truth, and they rejected imitation (*taqlīd*) of all subsequent scholars, including scholars that are revered in the Wahhabi tradition, such as Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Taymiyya, and Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab. The JSM nevertheless held al-Albani in very high esteem and organized teaching or lecture sessions with him whenever he came from Jordan to Mecca on pilgrimage.[29] They also had links to the Pakistani Ahl-e Hadith through Shaykh Badiʿ al-Din al-Sindi, a Pakistani scholar based in Mecca who was one of the JSM's main religious references. There were also contacts between the JSM and the Egyptian Salafi group Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya (Supporters of Muhammad's Tradition), whose monthly magazine, *al-Tawhid*, was widely read among JSM members and whose shaykhs would lecture at Bayt al-Ikhwan during their trips to Medina.[30]

The JSM's literal reading of religious texts led to an extreme social conservatism and to a rejectionist attitude toward many aspects of modernity. For example, they opposed the use of identity cards and passports because these denoted loyalty to an entity other than God. They were against images of living beings, not only on television and in photography but also on coins. More significantly, the JSM had peculiar views on ritual and prayer, which set the group apart from other religious communities at the time. They shared many of the interpretations presented by al-Albani in his book *Characteristics of the Prophet's Prayer*.[31] For example, they argued that the condition for breaking the fast during Ramadan was not the setting of the sun but the disappearance of sunlight, hence fast could be broken during Ramadan in a room with closed windows. They considered it permissible to pray while wearing sandals, which caused a certain amount of friction with fellow worshippers in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. Bayt al-Ikhwan, therefore, contained a mosque where the group's adherents could worship according to their own peculiar practices. Unlike other mosques, it contained no niche (*miḥrāb*), because the JSM considered this an innovation (*bidʿa*).

The unorthodox practices of the JSM worried Medina scholars who had initially been sympathetic to the group. Muqbil al-Wadiʿi, one of the JSM shaykhs, recalls being summoned by two senior Medina-based scholars, ʿAtiyya Salim and ʿUmar Falata, who questioned him on "twelve issues" which they deemed problematic.[32] The relations reached breaking point in the late summer of 1977, when a group of senior ulama led by Abu Bakr al-Jazaʾiri—Ibn Baz had already left Medina at this point—visited Bayt al-Ikhwan in the hope of convincing the members to relinquish their practices. They held a meeting on the roof, during which Shaykh al-Jazaʾiri clashed with the hard-line Juhayman al-ʿUtaybi.[33] The meeting ended with a split in the JSM: a minority—including most of the historical leaders of the group—declared their loyalty to al-Jazaʾiri and left Bayt al-Ikhwan, whereas a majority—comprising the youngest and most hotheaded members—rallied around Juhayman and insisted on continuing their work. Muqbil al-Wadiʿi recounts how he tried to mediate, unsuccessfully, between the two factions. Al-Wadiʿi writes that Juhayman was being extremely distrustful and openly accused fellow JSM members—including founding members of the group, such as Sulayman

al-Shtawi—of being police informers.[34] After the rooftop episode, Juhayman was left as the only senior person and the natural leader of the smaller and radicalized JSM. From then on, Juhayman's name became synonymous with the organization, and he and his followers simply referred to themselves as *ikhwān* (brothers).

JUHAYMAN'S IKHWAN

When Juhayman bin Muhammad bin Sayf al-ʿUtaybi rose to the fore as an Islamist leader in the mid-1970s, he was already in his forties. However, many questions remain about his early life. What we do know is that he was born in the early or mid 1930s to a bedouin family in the Ikhwan settlement (*hijra*) of Sajir in the western part of the Najd region. Juhayman's family belonged to the Suqur branch of the large ʿUtayba tribe. The young Juhayman was raised in a very traditional bedouin environment. His grandfather, Sayf al-Dhan, was a horseman who participated widely in bedouin raids before the emergence of the Saudi state under King ʿAbd al-ʿAziz.[35] Contrary to claims by some historians, Juhayman's grandfather was not involved in the Ikhwan revolts. According to al-Huzaymi, it was Juhayman's father, Muhammad bin Sayf, who fought beside the rebel leader Sultan bin Bijad. Muhammad survived the battle of Sbila in 1929 and lived until 1972. Juhayman was proud of his father's exploits and was keen to evoke the memory of the old Ikhwan to his comrades in the JSM.[36]

Juhayman left school very early. Al-Huzaymi says Juhayman himself admitted having completed only the fourth year of primary school. The widespread rumors of his illiteracy seem to be at least partially true. Al-Huzaymi says he never saw Juhayman write—and that the latter's spoken classical Arabic was poor and colored by bedouin dialect. The so-called "letters of Juhayman" were dictated to a friend acting as a scribe, al-Huzaymi says. However, as Joseph Kechichian has rightly pointed out, Juhayman was clearly not illiterate, given his command of religious literature and his authorship of several works in classical Arabic.[37] A likely explanation is, therefore, that Juhayman was dyslexic, in other words academically and linguistically able but uncomfortable with writing.

Juhayman spent the bulk of his working life in the national guard. By most accounts, he joined in 1955 and left in late 1973, although he may have left earlier.[38] His reasons for leaving the guard are unclear; some sources say he left voluntarily whereas others suggest that he was dismissed in humiliating circumstances. After leaving, he moved to Medina, yet again for unknown reasons. Lacking formal school qualifications, Juhayman never enrolled in the Islamic University of Medina, as many historians have suggested. However, he did attend classes for a period at Dar al-Hadith, an old institution specializing in the teaching of hadith, which is affiliated with the University of Medina. It was during that time that he joined the JSM. Juhayman rose to prominence in the JSM primarily because of his charisma, age, and tribal pedigree. It was particularly his readiness to openly criticize the ulama that drew the admiration of younger members of the organization.[39] After the rooftop episode and the split in the JSM, Juhayman would come to dominate the group to the extent that, according to al-Huzaymi, Juhayman's Ikhwan had many of the traits of a personality cult. The young members competed for Juhayman's favor and were socially ranked according to their relationship with and proximity to the leader. Juhayman in return punished those who dared to argue with him by ignoring them, which left them socially excluded from the group.[40]

In December 1977, shortly after the rooftop episode, the authorities, who had received reports of the group's radicalization through former members, decided to take action.[41] Police planned to raid Bayt al-Ikhwan and arrest Juhayman along with his associates. However, Juhayman received a tip-off about the coming raid some hours in advance by a police insider from the tribe of ʿUtayba.[42] Juhayman left Bayt al-Ikhwan immediately with two aides, one of whom was Nasir al-Huzaymi. He sought refuge in the desert, where police jurisdiction was weaker and his bedouin allies more numerous than in the cities. Juhayman stayed in the desert for almost two years, and he was not seen in public again until the seizure of the Great Mosque in Mecca. Meanwhile, around thirty people in Medina were arrested and imprisoned for six weeks under accusation of weapons possession. In the days that followed, leading Juhayman associates in other cities were also detained, although in smaller numbers.[43]

During these two years, Juhayman led a peripatetic life in the northern desert regions, in a triangle-shaped area between Haʾil, Burayda, and Hafr al-Batin. He was accompanied at any given time by a small entourage of three to five people, but he maintained contact with the rest of his followers. The police were continuously on his trail, and there are many anecdotes about Juhayman's secret ventures into inhabited areas. Shortly after his escape into the desert, Juhayman wanted to visit his mother in his hometown of Sajir but was prevented from doing so at the last minute when he received a tip-off that the police were keeping her under surveillance. At one stage, Juhayman suffered from a toothache, and after a long and painful wait, his aides managed to find a dentist who would not inform the authorities. Meanwhile, secret meetings for his followers were held in remote locations on a regular basis, although usually without Juhayman being present.[44]

After the police crackdown on Bayt al-Ikhwan, Juhayman no longer had a forum in which to gather followers and communicate his ideas. Juhayman's desert existence, therefore, marked the starting point of his ideological production. He started recording his ideas on cassette tapes and in pamphlets. None of the tape recordings is available today, but his pamphlets have survived.[45] They offer important insights into his thinking. However, there has been much confusion about the total number, exact titles, and real authorship.[46] Although these pamphlets are commonly referred to as the "letters of Juhayman," only eight of them were actually signed by him, and, as he was uncomfortable with writing, these had been dictated to his associates Muhammad al-Qahtani (the future Mahdi) and Ahmad al-Muʿallim, who transcribed them. It now seems clear that there are twelve letters in total and that they were published in batches of one, seven, and four. One is signed by al-Qahtani, one by a certain Yemeni named Hasan bin Muhsin al-Wahidi and two by *aḥad ṭalabat al-ʿilm* (one of the seekers of knowledge), a pseudonym used by another Yemeni called Muhammad al-Saghir.[47]

Of interest, the letters were printed in Kuwait by the leftist newspaper *al-Taliʿa* (the Vanguard), whose owners were sympathetic to what they interpreted as a potential working-class uprising in the Hijaz. A Kuwaiti JSM member named ʿAbd al-Latif al-Dirbas had used his family connections to negotiate a deal with the leftist publisher. He then coordinated the transport and distribution of several thousand copies of Juhayman's pamphlets across Saudi Arabia. Nasir Al-Huzaymi, who participated in the distribution of the first letter in Mecca, recalls several anecdotes regarding the publishing process. For example, the name of *al-Taliʿa* press had accidentally been printed on the front page of each copy and had to be removed with scissors. Another problem emerged when the

remarks from Shaykh Ibn Baz—to whom Juhayman had secretly presented the text for approval—arrived only after the text had been printed. Hence, Ibn Baz's remarks had to be manually rubber-stamped onto each and every copy.[48]

The first letter was distributed in several cities simultaneously on 31 August 1978.[49] The group of texts known as "the seven letters" was printed shortly afterward and distributed during the hajj in November 1978. A few months later came another group of four letters.[50] The "seven" and the "four" letters were also presented to Ibn Baz, who allegedly agreed with their content, except for the fact that they specifically targeted Saudi Arabia.[51] Their distribution angered the regime, which ordered new arrests within the JSM. Among the individuals targeted was Muqbil al-Wadiʿi, who was accused of being their author. He was released after three months and expelled to Yemen afterward.[52]

The letters were not only circulated across Saudi Arabia but also in Kuwait, where the JSM gathered a relatively large following. A good indication of its growing presence in Kuwait is the fact that ʿAbd al-Rahman ʿAbd al-Khaliq, the leading figure of the mainstream Salafi movement in the Emirate, wrote a series of articles in the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Watan* in late 1978 refuting Juhayman's ideas.[53] It is also worth noting that, on the day of the storming of the Mecca mosque, some of Juhayman's letters were distributed in Kuwaiti mosques.[54]

Juhayman's letters are written in a relatively monotonous religious language and do not reveal a particularly clear political doctrine. In the most political of his letters, "The State, Allegiance and Obedience" ("*al-imara wa-l-bayʿa wa-l-taʿa*"), Juhayman accused the Saudi regime of "making religion a means to guarantee their worldly interests, putting an end to jihad, paying allegiance to the Christians (America) and bringing over Muslims evil and corruption." He added that in any case, the Al Saʿud's non-Qurayshi origin (i.e., not descendants from the Prophet Muhammad's tribe) excluded them from the right to Islamic leadership. This led him to the conclusion that the *bayʿa* (oath of allegiance) that unites Saudis to their rulers is invalid (*bāṭila*) and that obeying them is no longer compulsory, especially on those very issues where their behavior and orders contradict God's word. He, therefore, called for his followers to keep away from state institutions by resigning if they were civil servants or by leaving school or university if they were still students.

He warned, however, that pronouncing *takfīr* (excommunication) upon rulers is prohibited as long as they call themselves Muslims. He thus differentiated between the state as an institution—which he deemed illegitimate and un-Islamic—and individual members of the government—whom he refused to excommunicate. Likewise, Juhayman was extremely critical of the official religious establishment as an institution, but he was more careful in expressing opinions about specific scholars such as Ibn Baz.

On a more doctrinal level, Juhayman revived several important concepts from the writings of hardline Wahhabi scholars from the 19th century such as Sulayman bin ʿAbdallah al-Shaykh and Hamad bin ʿAtiq.[55] The first concept was that of *millat Ibrahīm* (the community of Abraham), which is an allegory for the true Islamic community which has disassociated from all forms of impiety. The second was *awthaq ʿurā al-imān* (the strongest bonds of faith), meaning the links that unite Muslims with each other and impose on them mutual solidarity. Both concepts converged in the principle of *al-walāʾ wa-l-barāʾ* (allegiance to fellow Muslims and dissociation from infidels), which Juhayman made the defining principle for correct Islamic behavior.

Another important element in Juhayman's ideology is that of the coming of the Mahdi, the Islamic equivalent of the Messiah. The first of his "seven letters" is devoted entirely to this theme.[56] This text presents all the authentic hadiths about the Mahdi, correlating them with recent events in the modern history of the Arabian Peninsula to demonstrate the imminence of the Mahdi's coming. In the same pamphlet, he wrote that "we have dedicated all our efforts to this issue for the past eight years."[57] According to al-Huzaymi, the issue of the Mahdi had indeed been talked about in the JSM all along, but it only became a central part of Juhayman's discourse in mid 1978, after his escape into the desert. In late 1978, Juhayman declared that it had been confirmed to him in a dream that his companion Muhammad al-Qahtani was the Mahdi.[58] One of the reasons why al-Qahtani was identified as such was that he possessed several of the Mahdi's attributes as described in the corresponding hadiths. First, he was called Muhammad bin ʿAbdallah, as was the Prophet. Second, he claimed to belong to the *ashrāf*, the Prophet's lineage.[59] Third, his physical appearance was allegedly in conformity with the descriptions of the Mahdi in religious tradition.[60] The designation of al-Qahtani created a second major split in the organization. Many members, including Nasir al-Huzaymi, were unconvinced by the messianic talk and left the movement for good. It was this remaining core of Juhayman's followers who carried out one of the most spectacular operations in the history of militant Islamism, the seizure of the Great Mosque in Mecca.

On 20 November 1979, the first day of the 15th century of the Islamic calendar, a group of approximately 300 rebels led by Juhayman al-ʿUtaybi stormed and seized control of the great mosque in Mecca, the holiest place in Islam. Their aim was to have al-Qahtani consecrated as the Mahdi between the black stone corner of the Kaʿba (*al-rukn al-aswad*) and Ibrahim's station of prayer (*al-maqām*) as tradition requires. The militants barricaded themselves in the compound, taking thousands of worshippers hostage and awaiting the approach of a hostile army from the north, as promised by the eschatological tradition.[61] The situation developed into a two-week siege that left a hitherto unknown number of people dead and exposed serious gaps in the Saudi crisis-response capability. The timing of the attack was most likely determined by Juhayman's belief in the Sunni tradition of the "renewer of the century" (*mujaddid al-qarn*), according to which a great scholar will appear at the beginning of each *hijrī* century.[62] Juhayman may have attempted to blend the renewer tradition with the Sunni mahdist tradition and thus concluded that the dawn of the new century was a propitious moment to consecrate al-Qahtani as the Mahdi.[63] The Mecca rebellion was thus entirely unrelated to the Shiʿi uprising, which occurred almost simultaneously in the Eastern Province.[64] However, the occurrence of two internal uprisings in the space of a few months in 1979, as well as key international events such as the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, certainly affected the outlook of the Saudi political leadership.

Nasir al-Huzaymi, who had extensive conversations in prison with surviving rebels, says that Juhayman's group had begun collecting weapons in late 1978, approximately a year before the attack. The main coordinator of weapons acquisition was Muhammad al-Qahtani's brother Saʿid. He bought arms from Yemeni smugglers with money raised by wealthier members of the group. In the months preceding the attack, they conducted weapons training on various locations in the countryside outside Mecca and Medina.[65] The rebels knew in advance that their operation might turn into a siege, and they, therefore, placed approximately a week's worth of food supplies (dried milk, dates, and

bread) in the basement of the mosque complex shortly before the operation. Many also brought radios, expecting to hear news of the approach and subsequent engulfment of the hostile army from the north as promised by tradition. Al-Huzaymi's account also describes a rebel group perplexed by the death of Muhammad al-Qahtani already on the third day of the siege. Some started having second thoughts, while others obeyed Juhayman's orders not to acknowledge al-Qahtani's death. Even years after the events, some JSM followers continued to believe that the Mahdi was still alive.[66]

On 4 December 1979, Saudi authorities regained control of the sanctuary with the assistance of three French special-forces officers led by Captain Paul Barril. The rebels were tried and sentenced with lightning speed. At dawn on 9 January 1980, sixty-three people were executed in eight different cities around the kingdom. The list of convicts, which had been published two days earlier in the Saudi press, included forty-one Saudis, ten Egyptians, six South Yemenis, three Kuwaitis, a North Yemeni, an Iraqi, and a Sudanese.[67] However, the people executed do not necessarily represent the most prominent members in Juhayman's organization, but rather the individuals who fought most fiercely in the final stages of the siege and survived. Al-Huzaymi explains that prisoners underwent a quick medical examination to determine who would be executed. Those with bruises or pains in their shoulders were assumed to have fired upon the security forces and were punished by death. Those not executed received long prison sentences. Saudi police also arrested a large number of people across the kingdom who had been involved with the JSM or Juhayman's Ikhwan at some stage. Those who escaped arrest (or were released early) sought refuge in a variety of locations. Many went abroad, particularly to Kuwait but also to Yemen. Others sought a quiet existence in Riyadh or in conservative cities in the Najd, such as al-Zulfi and al-Rass.[68] The bedouins who had helped Juhayman were largely unaffected by the crackdown, and many of them are still present in the northern desert regions. Within a few months of the Mecca event, Juhayman's organization had been almost completely dismantled, at least in Saudi Arabia. The Kuwaiti branch of the movement survived and remained active until the end of the 1980s, albeit in a form closer to the original JSM than to Juhayman's Ikhwan.[69]

The Mecca event shook the regime, which was concentrating its political control on leftist groups and never expected its foes to come from religious circles. It decided, however, that only a reinforcement of the powers of the religious establishment and its control on Saudi society would prevent such unrest from happening again. Ironically, it was the other main Islamist current, the more institutionally integrated the Sahwa, which benefited from these new policies and grew stronger throughout the 1980s until it openly confronted the regime in the early 1990s.

INTERPRETING JUHAYMAN'S MOVEMENT

Juhayman's movement has been the subject of a significant number of analyses, some of them outwardly political, others overly simplistic. One explanation, heard particularly—but not only—from Saudi officials at the time, is that Juhayman's movement was the product of foreign ideological influences, mainly from Egyptian groups such as Shukri Mustafa's Jamaʿat al-Muslimin (Society of Muslims), commonly known as al-Takfir wa-l-Hijra (Excommunication and Emigration). These claims relied in part on the fact that many of the people arrested after the event were Egyptian citizens, as were ten of the

sixty-three executed rebels. It is indeed beyond doubt that there were Egyptian al-Takfir wa-l-Hijra members in Saudi Arabia in the mid-1970s.[70] However, al-Huzaymi insists that the Egyptian element in the JSM was negligible and that most of the arrested Egyptians had joined the rebellion immediately before the seizure of the mosque. He admits that in 1976–77 there were a handful of individuals in the JSM who held *takfīrī* positions, but they changed their minds after Shaykh al-Albani sat down with them during one of his visits to Medina and convinced them otherwise.[71] The most important foreign ideological influence on the JSM came not from Egyptian extremist groups but from al-Albani's *ahl al-ḥadīth* school of thought. If the JSM had contact with foreign organizations, it was primarily the Pakistani Ahl-e Hadith and the Egyptian Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya, both of which are apolitical, nonviolent movements. Hence these foreign contacts do not in any way explain the political radicalization and activism of Juhayman, whose movement must be understood primarily as a domestic Saudi phenomenon.

Among the interpretations of the Mecca episode found more often in academic literature is the view that Juhayman's rebellion was essentially a modern replay of the 1920s Ikhwan revolt.[72] The memory of the original Ikhwan certainly had an influence on Juhayman, who liked to tell his father's stories at JSM gatherings. There are also a few references to the early Ikhwan in Juhayman's letters, for example when he writes, "We wish to clear of all suspicions our 'Ikhwan' brothers who conducted jihad in the name of God and were faithful to it, while this State and its evil scholars presented them as Kharijites, to the extent that one can now find people to whom the issue is so unclear that they don't even ask God to grant them His mercy."[73] However, many of the JSM's members were not bedouin, and many among the bedouin in the JSM did not come from tribes that were prominent in the first Ikhwan revolt. It would, therefore, be far too simplistic to explain Juhayman's rebellion as a resurgence of old tribal grievances against the Al Saʿud. Restoring the honor of the first Ikhwan was only one minor aspect of the group's message. Despite their reactionary positions, the JSM and Juhayman's Ikhwan were essentially a modern phenomenon to be understood within the context of 1970s Saudi Arabia, a society undergoing rapid socioeconomic change and a steady process of politicization.

Another frequently heard explanation is that Juhayman and his followers were apocalyptics who had drifted so far in their belief in the Mahdi that they had lost their sense of political rationality. It seems relatively clear now that Juhayman's personal belief in the Mahdi was genuine and that this was indeed a major factor behind the takeover of the Mecca mosque. At the same time, Nasir al-Huzaymi insists that some of Juhayman's companions did not believe in the messianic dimension of his ideology. These individuals chose to stay because they felt a strong sense of loyalty to the charismatic Juhayman and to the group or because they were convinced of other aspects of the ideology, such as the need for a religious and moral purification of society.[74] Moreover, reducing Juhayman's Ikhwan to a messianic sect would ignore the political dimension of Juhayman's discourse as well as the question of why this movement gathered such strength at this particular point in time. It seems, then, that we need to understand Juhayman's group as being simultaneously messianic and political.

A last interpretation, favored by the Arab left at the time of the attack, is that the Mecca event represented a "people's rebellion," in which the disenfranchised Saudi working class rose up against the rich Saudi elite. Days after the event, the Arab Socialist Labour

Party in the Arabian Peninsula expressed its support for the rebels. Shortly afterward, Nasir al-Saʿid, the historic leader of the Arabian Peninsula People's Union, described the attack as part of a "people's revolution" aimed at establishing a republic and adopting democratic freedoms.[75] He claimed that fighting had been going on in other places, such as Tabuk, Medina, Najran, and parts of Najd—a version of the events adopted by Alexei Vassiliev, among others.[76] Al-Saʿid's allegation seemed so well informed that it caught the attention of Saudi authorities, and on 17 December 1979 he mysteriously disappeared in Beirut, never to reappear. Today, it is clear that his claims were not true.[77] However, the leftists were to some extent right in pointing out that the rebels were for the most part poor and disenfranchised. As noted earlier, Juhayman's Brotherhood, as the JSM before it, drew most of its members from the politically, economically, and socially marginalized sections of Saudi society, particularly recently sedentary nomadic tribes and residents of foreign origin.

As we have seen from this discussion, there is no simple explanation for the emergence of Juhayman's movement. A first and important step in the analysis is to distinguish between the JSM on the one hand and Juhayman's Brotherhood on the other. The emergence of the JSM seems to be linked to three important societal changes in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s and 1970s. The first was the slow but steady push toward increased social conservatism from a religious establishment that sensed that it was losing its grip on an increasingly liberal society. The second was the arrival of new ideological currents that provided alternatives to the established political and religious order. The third was the socioeconomic tensions resulting from Saudi Arabia's rapid modernization process. As for the emergence of Juhayman's Brotherhood, it seems to have followed a classic pattern of group radicalization, whereby a small faction breaks out of a larger and more moderate organization after a process of politicization and internal debate. After the break, the behavior of the radicalized faction is more determined by ideology and charismatic leadership than by structural socioeconomic and political factors.

JUHAYMAN'S LEGACY

It has long been assumed that Juhayman al-ʿUtaybi and his movement represent an exceptional and rather short-lived phenomenon whose influence on the subsequent history of Saudi Islamism has been rather limited. However, as we shall see, there are many indications that the memory of Juhayman has been kept alive in certain Islamist circles until today and that his ideology has inspired periodic attempts at reviving his movement.

Most prominent among Juhayman's intellectual heirs is Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (aka ʿIsam Barqawi, b. 1959), a radical Islamist ideologue of Palestinian origin who grew up in Kuwait. In the early 1980s, he started frequenting Islamist circles in Kuwait, where he came in contact with the local JSM branch, whose ranks had swelled with the arrival of remnants of the Saudi JSM in 1980.[78] He became friends with Juhayman's former associate ʿAbd al-Latif al-Dirbas, who had come back from Saudi Arabia after being released from prison.[79] In 1981 or 1982, al-Maqdisi went to Medina to study religion, during which time he made many contacts with former Juhayman sympathizers across the kingdom.

Al-Maqdisi's writings were heavily influenced by Juhayman's ideology and contained numerous references to Juhayman.[80] However, al-Maqdisi was more radical than

Juhayman on several issues. Most notably, al-Maqdisi did not hesitate to pronounce *takfīr* upon Muslim rulers. In 1989, he wrote a book, *al-Kawashif al-jaliyya fi kufr al-dawla al-Saʿudiyya* (The Obvious Proofs of the Saudi State's Impiety), in which he praised Juhayman, while adding that "unfortunately, he [Juhayman] considered that rebelling against these rulers, whatever they may do, . . . is contrary to the Sunna. . . . Very unfortunately, he considered this government to be Muslim."[81]

Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi did not remain with the JSM for long as he kept arguing with them over the issue of *takfīr*. Instead, he went to Peshawar in 1985 to join the Arab–Afghan community, and he subsequently became one of the leading ideologues of the so-called Salafi-Jihadi movement. However, he preserved his admiration for Juhayman, and in the late 1980s he traveled regularly to Saudi Arabia, where he paid visits to former friends of Juhayman in the Saudi desert.[82] In the early 1990s, al-Maqdisi left Peshawar and settled in Jordan, where he became the spiritual leader of a Jordanian militant community. He was imprisoned in 1995 but has continued to write from his cell. Recently, al-Maqdisi has attracted much attention for his open criticism of his former pupil Abu Musʿab al-Zarqawi's activities in Iraq.

The early 1990s witnessed a revival of Juhayman's ideas in certain Islamist circles in Saudi Arabia. The authors of the current article learned of the existence of a small community of young Saudi Islamists in Riyadh in the early 1990s who saw themselves as the continuation of Juhayman's movement.[83] The community had taken shape around a core of three or four individuals in their early twenties who considered society in general, and state education in particular, corrupt.[84] They had broken with their families and set themselves up in an apartment in the Shubra area of al-Suwaydi district in Riyadh where they could study religion on their own. Their apartment, which aimed at recreating Juhayman's Bayt al-Ikhwan, was known as Bayt Shubra, and it soon became a meeting place for like-minded youth. Although only five to ten people lived there at any one time, many more attended informal lessons or dropped by for discussion and socializing.

The residents of Bayt Shubra did not consider themselves part of an organization, but rather "seekers of religious knowledge" (*ṭalabat ʿilm*). In their view, this knowledge could not be found among the shaykhs of the religious establishment, whom they considered corrupt, nor among the leaders of the Sahwa, whom they saw as too political. Instead they looked to the writings of Juhayman, al-Maqdisi, and 19th-century Wahhabi theologians such as Sulayman bin ʿAbdallah Al al-Shaykh. The residents of Bayt Shubra greatly admired Juhayman and saw themselves as his ideological successors. Because none of them was old enough to have known Juhayman personally, they sought out former members of the JSM in various parts of the country, particularly among the bedouin in the desert.[85] They also invited former JSM members in Riyadh to lecture in Bayt Shubra. Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi himself visited the apartment during one of his visits to Saudi Arabia.[86] The Bayt Shubra residents adopted the JSM's extreme social conservatism, strong emphasis on ritual matters, as well as its skepticism toward the state and its institutions. Juhayman's mahdist ideas, however, do not seem to have been particularly important in Bayt Shubra, although some of its residents did accept those ideas and continued to believe that the Mahdi had not died in 1979.

Over time, however, the Bayt Shubra community grew more and more interested in politics, and its members would eventually take more radical positions than Juhayman

on several questions. Although the Bayt Shubra community was initially inward looking and apolitical, it was unable to avoid the political–religious debates of early 1990s Saudi Arabia, a time when the confrontation between the state and the Sahwa was at its most intense. The process of politicization introduced several disagreements, first (in 1992) on the issue of *takfīr* of the royal family and later (around 1994) regarding *takfīr* of the religious establishment. Eventually, the Bayt Shubra network split into several factions, each of which went its own way. The involvement of some former Bayt Shubra members in the 1995 Riyadh bombings led police to try to arrest the entire network. A few members managed to escape and found shelter with the very bedouin they had earlier gotten to know through their fascination with Juhayman. The others were marked by prison experience in different ways: some became more radical (several of them subsequently went to Afghanistan) whereas others began a process of soul-searching and went on to become liberal intellectuals.

Bayt Shubra was just one of many similar study circles that emerged throughout the kingdom at the time. Although these groups remained relatively marginal compared with the Sahwa—which was at its climax at this point—their very existence provides two significant new insights about Islamism in Saudi Arabia in the early 1990s. First, the ideology and example of Juhayman still had a significant appeal among young Saudis ten years after the Mecca event, and second, the Sahwa did not have a monopoly on the Islamist field. The Bayt Shubra residents shunned the Sahwa leaders (whom they saw as too interested in politics) and sought knowledge and inspiration from a different intellectual tradition. Among these communities, Bayt Shubra is historically the most interesting because many of its residents later became well-known figures. Some became prominent liberal writers, such as Mishari al-Dhayidi and ʿAbdallah al-ʿUtaybi, whereas others made names as militants. Bayt Shubra's alumni include three of the four people convicted for the November 1995 Riyadh bombing as well as some of the senior militants involved in the terrorist campaign launched in 2003.[87]

CONCLUSION: JUHAYMAN AL-ʿUTAYBI AND "REJECTIONIST ISLAMISM" IN SAUDI ARABIA

The study of Juhayman's legacy has shown that the influence of Juhayman on the development of Saudi Islamism is greater than generally assumed. Moreover, it has allowed us to trace the origins and the development of a particular intellectual tradition within Saudi Islamism, which categorically rejects the legitimacy of the state and its institutions and which advocates withdrawal from the state's sphere. This intellectual tradition may be termed "rejectionist Islamism." Saudi rejectionist Islamism bears some similarity to other Islamist groups characterized by a withdrawal from society (such as Shukri Mustafa's Jamaʿat al-Muslimin in Egypt), but it is first and foremost a Saudi phenomenon to be understood within the dynamics of the Saudi political–religious landscape. Although the JSM and the Bayt Shubra network have no doubt been two of the most visible and politicized manifestations of this strain of Islamism, related communities have existed—and still exist—in Saudi Arabia.[88]

Identifying a rejectionist strain in Saudi Islamism also makes it easier to distinguish it from the better known phenomenon of "reformist Islamism," as exemplified by the Sahwa. The Sahwa consisted of prominent academics well integrated into the system,

whereas the rejectionists attract the marginalized and avoid state education and employment altogether. They also clearly differ in their attitude toward the state: Sahwa Islamists such as Salman al-ʿAwda never openly question the state's legitimacy, only criticizing (although sometimes with virulence) its policies, which they strive to change through nonviolent, institutional means.

The 1980s witnessed the emergence of a third strain of Saudi Islamism: jihadism, which has its roots in the participation of thousands of Saudi youth in the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union. The jihadists developed a highly militaristic culture that set them apart from other Islamist currents. They were also explicitly interested in politics, which rejectionists were not. However, Saudi jihadists were initially politicized and radicalized on issues of international politics, not on issues of domestic politics, like their counterparts in other Arab countries. In 1990, Saudi jihadists were not openly critical of the Saudi state.

In the first half of the 1990s, jihadists and rejectionists started to mix, as was the case in the Bayt Shubra community. Although they represented two different cultures—rejectionists being men of introspection and jihadists being men of action—their views converged on many important issues. Most importantly, they influenced each other, as many rejectionists became more interested in politics whereas the jihadists adopted the rejectionists' strong distaste for the Saudi state. By the late 1990s, many rejectionists had joined the jihadists and left for Afghanistan or elsewhere. By the early 2000s, the growing polarization of the Saudi Islamist field between reformists and jihadists left little room for the rejectionists. Juhayman's intellectual legacy had effectively been eclipsed—but the memory of his rebellion was more in vogue than ever.

NOTES

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[1]There are several reasons why we have used Juhayman and not al-ʿUtaybi on second reference. First is convention—most academic articles we have seen use his first name. The convention itself stems from the fact that most Saudis refer to him by his first name. This is partly because Juhayman is an uncommon name, whereas al-ʿUtaybi is very common.

[2]For a reliable and updated account of the siege, see Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 88–94.

[3]The main works on the history of Saudi Arabia mention Juhayman only in very brief terms; see, for example, Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (London: al-Saqi, 2000), 395–97; Madawi al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 144–46. A few English-language academic books and articles have dealt with the phenomenon in somewhat more detail, but most of them are based on secondary sources in Arabic; see James Buchan, "The return of the Ikhwan-1979," in David Holden and Richard Johns, *The House of Saud: The Rise and Rule of the Most Powerful Dynasty in the Arab World* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), 511–26; Ayman al-Yassini, *Religion and State in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1985), 124–27; R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1985), 133–7; Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam* (London: Routledge, 1994), 99–104; Joshua Teitelbaum, *Holier than Thou: Saudi Arabia's Islamic Opposition* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000), 19–21. Perhaps the only Western study to make systematic use of primary sources is Joseph Kechichian's excellent 1990 article on Juhayman's letters; see Joseph A. Kechichian, "Islamic Revivalism and Change in Saudi Arabia: Juhayman al-ʿUtaybi's 'Letters to the Saudi People,'" *The Muslim World* 70 (1990): 1–16; see also Kechichian, "The Role of the Ulama in the Politics of an Islamic State: The Case of Saudi Arabia," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 18 (1986): 53–71.

[4]Perhaps the most well-known work is that of Rifat Sayyid Ahmad entitled *Rasa'il Juhayman al-ʿUtaybi, qa'id al-muqtahimin li-l-Masjid al-Haram bi-Makka* (The Letters of Juhayman al-ʿUtaybi, Leader of the Invaders of the Sacred Mosque in Mecca) (Cairo: Madbuli, 2004). A Saudi leftist militant has produced a long and interesting work under the pseudonym Abu Dharr; see Abu Dharr, *Thawra fi rihab Makka* (Revolution in the Mecca Precinct) (Kuwait: Dar Sawt al-Taliʿa, 1980). The text was first published in the leftist opposition magazine *Sawt al-Taliʿa*, 21, April 1980, under the name "*Ahdath al-Haram bayna al-haqa'iq wa-l-abatil*" (The Haram Events, between Truth and Lies). The London-based Saudi Shiʿite opposition has produced several interesting works: *Intifadat al-Haram* (Uprising in the Sanctuary) (London: Munazzamat al-Thawra al-Islamiyya fi al-Jazira al-Arabiyya, 1981), which the organization first published in its magazine before turning it into a book; as well as *Zilzal Juhayman fi Makka* (Juhayman's Earthquake in Mecca) (n.p., 1986), signed by a certain Fahd al-Qahtani, a pseudonym for Hamza al-Hasan, a Shiʿite opposition figure based in London. Another work is ʿAbd al-ʿAzim al-Matʿani, *Jarimat al-ʿasr: Qissat ihtilal al-Masjid al-Haram: riwayat shahid ʿiyan* (The Crime of the Age: Eyewitness Account of the Occupation of the Sacred Mosque) (Cairo: Dar al-Ansar, 1980).

[5]See *al-Riyadh*, 10 June 2003; *al-Riyadh*, 18 June 2003; *al-Riyadh*, 9 May 2004; *al-Riyadh*, 6 September 2004. See also articles by Mishari al-Dhayidi in *al-Sharq al-awsat*, 24 and 25 February 2004; and Adil al-Turayfi in *al-Riyadh*, 10 and 13 March 2004.

[6]Stéphane Lacroix, "Saudi Arabia's Islamo-Liberal Reformists," *Middle East Journal* 58 (2004): 345–65.

[7]This enquiry revealed, for example, that Hamza al-Hasan based *Zilzal Juhayman fi Makka* on interviews with two former members of the JSM other than al-Huzaymi. Another finding is that Abu Dharr (author of *Thawra fi rihab Makka*) is not the pseudonym of an Islamist commentator as previously believed (Kechichian, "Islamic Revivalism," 12), but an old *nom de guerre* of a leftist activist linked to the Saudi Baʿth party. According to Hamza al-Hasan, Abu Dharr's insights stem from the fact that he was based in Iraq and had access to Iraqi intelligence sources; interview with Hamza al-Hasan, London, February 2006.

[8]In this article, "Islamism" is understood in a very broad sense as "Islamic activism" directed at either the state or society.

[9]See Stéphane Lacroix and Thomas Hegghammer, *Saudi Arabia Backgrounder: Who Are the Islamists?* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2004).

[10]Vasiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 272.

[11]Lacroix and Hegghammer, *Saudi Arabia Backgrounder.*

[12]ʿAbd al-ʿAziz bin Baz (1909–99), grand mufti of Saudi Arabia from 1993 until his death in 1999, became one of the most respected figures of the Wahhabi religious establishment in the late 20th century.

[13]The founding members included Sulayman al-Shtawi and Saʿd al-Tamimi. Interviews with Nasir al-Huzaymi, Riyadh, April 2004 and April 2005.

[14]The Jamaʿat al-Tabligh (usually known as Tabligh or Tablighi Jamaʿat) is a pietistic and apolitical missionary organization founded in India in the late 19th century. Although it was quite popular among Saudi youth in the 1970s, the senior shaykhs of the religious establishment reproached it for not subscribing entirely to the Wahhabi creed (they regarded the Tablighis as "Sufis").

[15]Abu Bakr al-Jaza'iri (literally "the Algerian") was born in 1921 in south Algeria, where he frequented religious circles close to shaykh ʿAbd al-Hamid bin Badis, before leaving the country in 1952 to settle in Saudi Arabia. He worked as a professor at the Islamic University of Medina from its foundation in 1961 until his retirement in 1986. He is known in Salafi circles to have been close to the Tabligh, which could explain the interest he found in a grass-roots proselytizing and pietistic movement such as the JSM. For his biography, see Muhammad al-Majdhub, *ʿUlama' wa mufakkirun ʿaraftuhum—al-juz' al-awwal* (Scholars and Thinkers I have Known—Part One) (Cairo: Dar al-Iʿtisam, 1986).

[16]Interview with Saudi Islamist, Riyadh, November 2005.

[17]Al-Huzaymi says that there were in fact two separate episodes referred to by JSM members as "the breaking of the pictures." The second incident occurred in the mid-1970s, when JSM members were arrested for breaking pictures of the newly crowned King Khalid.

[18]Ibn Baz's position on this matter can probably be explained by mainstream Salafism's traditionally negative attitude toward the creation of parties, organizations, or groups, which are considered as fragmenting the community, and, therefore, as a means for sedition (*fitna*). The only exception is the groups of *muṭawwaʿun* (often described as Saudi Arabia's religious police), who are seen as putting into practice the Qur'anic injunction of *al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa-l-nahī ʿan al-munkar* (commanding right and forbidding wrong), a function also

called *ḥisba*; see Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[19]It must be emphasized here that the JSM emerged as a perfectly legal pietistic movement which, according to al-Huzaymi, actually produced documents with its name printed on the letterhead. Ibn Baz's involvement should, therefore, not be interpreted as an unholy alliance with a clandestine Islamist opposition group.

[20]See *al-Riyadh*, 9 May 2004.

[21]Al-Huzaymi, interview.

[22]Al-Huzaymi's information is unique because until recently the only available source on the rebels' profiles was the list of names and nationalities of the sixty-three rebels executed in January 1980, published in the Saudi press at the time. This list has two significant limitations: first, it does not allow us to distinguish between a *badawī* and a *qabalī* nor between foreigners with and without Saudi citizenship. Second, the list is likely to include individuals who joined the rebels immediately before the attack and who were not necessarily longtime followers of Juhayman. In contrast, al-Huzaymi was able to provide us with substantial information on the background of individuals whom he personally met during is time as a JSM member in Medina or as a prisoner.

[23]The term *badawī* (pl. *badū*) usually refers to members of bedouin tribes who "recently" became sedentary, in most cases at the time of the 1920s Ikhwan and after. A *badawī* is distinguished from a *qabalī* (tribal), who is basically a *ḥaḍarī* (sedentary) with a tribal genealogy. Among the *ḥaḍar* (sedentaries), the *qabalī* is himself distinguished from the *khaḍīrī*, who has no tribal genealogy.

[24]Of thirty-five individuals, we have fifteen *badū* in total (i.e., 43 percent): five Harbi, five Shammari, three ʿUtaybi, one Tamimi, and one unknown. The relatively high number of individuals from Harb and Shammar compared to that of ʿUtayba should not surprise the reader as al-Huzaymi was mainly based in Medina, which is closer to these two tribes' territory. The presence of these individuals also proves that the ʿUtayba was only one of many *badū* elements in Juhayman's Ikhwan.

[25]Steffen Hertog, "Segmented Clientelism: The Politics of Economic Reform in Saudi Arabia" (PhD diss., Oxford University, 2006).

[26]Nine (i.e., almost 25 percent) of the thirty-five people described by al-Huzaymi were of foreign origin. Six had a Yemeni background, and one was from the Saudi–Yemeni border region of Najran. Al-Huzaymi's sample also includes a Saudi of Egyptian origin and a Saudi of Iranian origin. The Yemenis in particular featured prominently in the movement. Muqbil al-Wadiʿi was considered one of their main scholars, Ahmad al-Muʿallim administered Bayt al-Ikhwan, and Yusuf Bajunayd was a key financial contributor.

[27]In Saudi Arabia, the relationship between social background on the one hand and socioeconomic status on the other is a complex one. Individuals of foreign descent may be socially and politically marginalized but are not necessarily economically disadvantaged. (Yusuf Bajunayd, a wealthy Saudi of Yemeni origin who funded Juhayman's group, is a case in point.) Conversely, *badū* may enjoy a high social status but remain economically weak.

[28]Al-Yassini, *Religion and State*, 125.

[29]Al-Huzaymi recalls his visit to a tent camp in Mina outside Mecca during the hajj in early December 1976. The tent housed around 250 people, most of whom were JSM members. Al-Albani and Juhayman were in close contact. Al-Albani would hold many lectures over consecutive days.

[30]The Ahl-e Hadith is an Islamic revivalist movement founded in Bhopal, India, in the mid-19th century. It puts great emphasis on the study of hadith and rejects all schools of jurisprudence. Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya was founded in Egypt in 1926 by Muhammad Hamid al-Fiqqi, a Salafi scholar heavily influenced by the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya. Both Ahl-e Hadith and Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya have maintained strong links to Saudi Arabia and the Wahhabi religious establishment throughout the 20th century.

[31]Muqbil al-Wadiʿi writes that, although they did follow many of al-Albani's views, they also differed with him on a small number of issues; See Muqbil al-Wadiʿi, *al-Makhraj min al-fitna* (Sanaa, Yemen: Maktabat Sanʿa al-Athariyya, 2002), 140.

[32]Al-Wadiʿi, *al-Makhraj min al-fitna*, 140.

[33]The details and significance of the rooftop meeting have been confirmed and corroborated by several independent sources; al-Wadiʿi, *al-Makhraj min al-fitna*; al-Huzaymi, interview; and Nabil Mouline's interview (in Mecca in April 2005) with a senior Wahhabi shaykh who attended the meeting.

[34]Al-Wadiʿi, *al-Makhraj min al-fitna*, 141.

[35]*Al-Sharq al-awsat*, 24 and 25 February 2004.

[36]Al-Huzaymi, interview. See also *al-Sharq al-awsat*, 24 and 25 February 2004.

[37]Kechichian, "Islamic Revivalism and Change in Saudi Arabia," 11.

[38]*Intifadat al-Haram*, 35–39.

[39]Al-Huzaymi, interview.

[40]*Al-Riyadh*, 18 June 2003.

[41]After failing to get the JSM to renounce their controversial practices, the senior scholars alerted the authorities and allegedly started falsely accusing the JSM of possessing weapons and preparing a coup; al-Huzaymi, interview; al-Wadiʿi, *al-Makhraj min al-fitna*, 141.

[42]Al-Huzaymi, interview.

[43]In Riyadh, for example, four or five people were arrested, including Muhammad al-Qahtani (the future Mahdi) and Muhammad al-Haydari (head of the JSM Riyadh branch).

[44]Al-Huzaymi recalls a general meeting for the remaining members, held in the desert along the Qasim road between Riyadh and Sudayr a few weeks after the first arrests. According to al-Huzaymi, the meeting was attended by approximately eighty people.

[45]Tape recordings of Juhayman were circulating in Islamist circles in Saudi Arabia at least as late as the early 1990s.

[46]Kechichian, "Islamic Revivalism and Change in Saudi Arabia."

[47]Al-Huzaymi, interview.

[48]Juhayman himself claimed that Ibn Baz had found "nothing wrong in it." See "Daʿwat al-ikhwan" ("The Call of the Ikhwan"), quoted by al-Qahtani, *Zilzal Juhayman fi Makka*, 28.

[49]Al-Huzaymi, interview. He took part personally in the distribution.

[50]The first letter was entitled "Rafʿ al-iltibas ʿan millat man jaʿalahu Allah imaman li-l-nas" ("Clarification about the Community of Whom God Has Made a Guide for the People"); the group of seven pamphlets was entitled "al-Rasa'il al-sabʿ" ("The Seven Letters"). The group of four bore the title "majmuʿat rasa'il al-imara wa-l-tawhid wa-daʿwat-al-ikhwan wa-l-mizan li-hayat al-insan" ("Group of the Letters 'The State,' 'The Unity of God,' 'The Call of the Brotherhood,' and 'The Scale for the Life of Man' "); Abu Dharr, *Thawra fi rihab Makka*, 113.

[51]"Daʿwat al-ikhwan," quoted in al-Qahtani, *Zilzal Juhayman fi Makka*, 37.

[52]Muqbil al-Wadiʾi, *Tarjamat Abi ʿAbd al-Rahman Muqbil bin Hadi al-Wadiʿi* (Sanaa, Yemen: Dar al-Athar, 2002), 27.

[53]Telephone interview with ʿAbd al-Rahman ʿAbd al-Khaliq in Khalid Sultan's office, Kuwait, May 2005. Some of these early refutations have later been collected in a book by ʿAbd al-Khaliq entitled *Al-Walaʾ wa-l-baraʾ* (Loyalty and Dissociation).

[54]Interviews with Khalid Sultan and Ismaʿil al-Shatti, Kuwait, May 2005.

[55]Their writings were compiled in the early 20th century in an influential book known as *al-Durar al-saniyya fi-l-ajwiba al-Najdiyya* (The Glittering Pearls of the Najdi Answers).

[56]"Al-Fitan wa akhbar al-Mahdi wa nuzul ʿIsa ʿalayhi al-salam wa ashrat al-saʿa" ("Turmoil and the Reports of the Mahdi and the Coming of Jesus—Peace Be Upon Him—and the Portents of the Last Hour" [i.e., Judgment Day]).

[57]Ahmad, *Rasaʾil Juhayman al-ʿUtaybi*, 209.

[58]According to al-Huzayimi, al-Qahtani had been imam at the small al-Ruwayl mosque in Riyadh, and was one of the founding members of the JSM's Riyadh branch.

[59]Muhammad al-Qahtani claimed that his ancestor, a *sharīf* (pl. *ashrāf*), had come from Egypt with Muhammad ʿAli's army in the early 19th century and had settled in one the villages inhabited by the members of the tribe of Qahtan, therefore, becoming a "Qahtani by alliance."

[60]"The Mahdi is from me—he has a wide forehead and a hooked nose," *Sunan Abu Dawud*, 36, 4272.

[61]"Disagreement will occur at the death of a caliph and a man of the people of Medina will come flying forth to Mecca. Some of the people of Mecca will come to him, bring him out against his will and swear allegiance to him between the *rukn* and the *maqām*. An expeditionary force will then be sent against him from Syria but will be swallowed up in the desert between Mecca and Medina. When the people see that, the eminent saints of Syria and the best people of Iraq will come to him and swear allegiance to him between the *rukn* and the *maqām*," *Sunan Abu Dawud*, 36, 4273.

[62]See, for example, Ella Landau-Tasseron, "The cyclical reform: A study of the *mujaddid* tradition," *Studia Islamica* 70 (1989).

[63]The authors thank Professor Berhard Haykel for this analysis.

[64]Toby Craig Jones, "Rebellion on the Saudi Periphery, Modernity, Marginalization and the Shia Uprising of 1979," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38 (2006): 213–33.

[65]A British journalist stationed in Saudi Arabia at the time says he interviewed a Saudi farmer in December 1979 who said he had observed a group of ragged men firing weapons in a field outside Mecca in November 1979; Interview with James Buchan, London, February 2006.

[66]Al-Huzaymi, interview.

[67]Abu Dharr, *Thawra fi rihab Mecca*, 125.

[68]*Al-Sharq al-awsat*, 6 April 2005.

[69]Among the prominent Kuwaiti JSM members at the time were Jabir al-Jalahma, who subsequently became a prominent jihadist figure; ʿAbdallah al-Nafisi, one of the most influential Islamist thinkers in Kuwait; and Khalid al-ʿAdwa, who later joined the mainstream Salafi current and became a member of parliament.

[70]*Al-Riyadh*, 19 and 26 May 2003; Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003): 89.

[71]Al-Huzaymi, interview; al-Wadiʿi, *al-Makhraj min al-fitna*, 141.

[72]See, for instance, Ahmad, *Rasaʾil Juhayman al-ʿUtaybi*, 62–63.

[73]Ibid, 84.

[74]A separate incident narrated by al-Huzaymi illustrates this sense of loyalty. When ʿAbdallah al-Harbi, a former JSM member who did not believe in the Mahdi and had left the group, heard the news of the storming of the Mecca mosque, he decided to organize the storming of the Medina mosque to diminish the pressure on Juhayman and his followers. However, he was shot by police at a checkpoint on his way to Sajir to gather followers for his project.

[75]One possible explanation for these declarations is that the Saudi leftist opposition tried to take advantage of the political situation to regain the visibility it had lost since the late 1960s.

[76]Nasir al-Saʿid in *al-Dustur*, quoted in *MERIP Report* 85 (1980): 17.

[77]Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, for instance, writes that he received confirmation from former JSM members that there was no broader plan, and no operations in other cities. See Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, "al-Kawashif al-jaliyya fi kufr al-dawla al-Saʿudiyya" ("The Obvious Proofs of the Saudi State's Impiety"), 197, available at www.tawhed.ws

[78]See al-Maqdisi's 1998 interview with the Islamist magazine *Nidaʾ al-Islam*, available at www.tawhed.ws

[79]Al-Maqdisi later married the sister of al-Dirbas' wife. See *al-Sharq al-awsat*, 15 May and 7 July 2003.

[80]See in particular "Millat Ibrahim" ["Abraham's Creed"] from 1984 (available at www.tawhed.ws), in which he adopts and further develops Juhayman's doctrinal system, and "Iʿdad al-qada al-fawaris bi-hajr fasad al-madaris" ("Preparing Shrewd Leaders by Abandoning the Corruption of the Schools") from 1989 (available at www.tawhed.ws), in which al-Maqdisi reiterates Juhayman's rejection of state education and employment.

[81]Al-Maqdisi, *al-Kawashif al-Jaliyya*, 198.

[82]Interview with ʿAbdallah al-ʿUtaybi, Riyadh, April 2004.

[83]Interview with Mishari al-Dhayidi, Jedda, June 2003. Interviews with ʿAbdallah al-ʿUtaybi and unidentified Saudi former Islamist, Riyadh, April 2004.

[84]The leadership core included Mishari al-Dhayidi and ʿAbdallah al-ʿUtaybi. They have subsequently become outspoken liberals and prominent writers.

[85]Bayt Shubra residents were primarily in contact with bedouins in northwestern Najd, whom they accessed through a Pakistani former member of JSM who lived in the town of al-Rass. Interview with Saud al-Sarhan, Riyadh, April 2004.

[86]Interview with unidentified Saudi former Islamist.

[87]Ibrahim al-Rayyis and Saud al-ʿUtaybi had frequented Bayt Shubra regularly. ʿAbd al-ʿAziz al-Muqrin had visited once or twice. Interview with al-ʿUtaybi. See also *al-Sharq al-awsat*, 9 December 2003 and 6 April 2005.

[88]Just outside the city of Burayda, a community known as "the *ikhwān* of Burayda" (brotherhood of Burayda) lives in near isolation from the society around them. They do not interact with the state and refuse to adopt modern technologies such as electricity, cars, or telephones. There were similarities and even direct links between the JSM and the *ikhwān* of Burayda. Another ultraconservative and isolationist community is found in the neighborhood called *hayy al-muhājirīn* in the Najdi city of Zulfi.